

A Bridge Over Time



Listen to the roar of traffic on Highway 99W. The noise overwhelms the quiet lapping of the languid Tualatin River as it meanders toward the Willamette. During the 1850s and 1860s, the gentle clatter of wagons traveling along Taylor's Ferry Road, and the cheerful whistles of steamboats hauling freight between Bridgeport (Tualatin) and Forest Grove, echoed off these shores. By the 1940s, with the automobile firmly established as the primary means of transportation, hundreds of people flocked to these banks every weekend to picnic, swim, and frolic along the river.



Steamboats traveled the Tualatin River between 1865 and 1950, transporting goods and farm produce between Bridgeport (early Tualatin) and Forest Grove. Photo courtesy of the Oregon Historical Society.



The Taylor's Ferry Covered Bridge was built in 1918. Photo courtesy of the Oregon Historical Society.



The old Taylor's Ferry Covered Bridge pilings are still visible.



John A. Taylor (1825-1919), an Oregon Trail Pioneer established a ferry crossing in 1854 at the site of the existing 99W bridge. Later, he constructed a toll bridge here and cleared a road between Portland and Dayton that became Taylor's Ferry Road.

Modern concrete bridges span the Tualatin River at this crossing today, but during the mid-1850s, a ferry operated by John A. Taylor provided the only safe crossing. Taylor trekked the Oregon Trail from Wisconsin in 1852 with his wife and three small children. Securing a donation land claim of 320 acres along this stretch of the river, he quickly installed a ferry and established a road between Portland and Dayton called Taylor's Ferry Road. Taylor operated the ferry for several years before building a toll bridge in the late 1860s.

When prosperity followed in the wake of the Great Depression of the 1930s, Americans purchased automobiles in record numbers and rediscovered the "great outdoors." Private parks sprang up along many of Oregon's rivers. The largest and most popular parks along the Tualatin were located just upriver: Avalon Park on the north bank, and Roamer's Rest on the south. The parks catered to families with picnic tables, ball fields, rental boats, and lifeguards—dance halls with floating docks for boat access provided evening entertainment. Avalon and Roamer's Rest thrived into the 1950s.



Roamer's Rest located on the Tualatin River circa 1942. Photo courtesy of Bill Gilham.



Today, canoeists enjoy the Tualatin River.